

Portland Reputation Management Expert Reacted After Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke Uses Taxpayer Dollars for $12,000 Charter Flight

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Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke, from Montana, and several staffers chartered an oil company plane, costing taxpayers $12,375, according to reports.

On June 26, Zinke and several staffers flew on a Beechcraft King Air 200 from Las Vegas, where he had a speaking engagement, to Montana, according to an internal calendar that was revealed by Politico. The plane belongs to an oil and gas exploration firm, and was paid for by the Interior Department.

The flight cost taxpayers $12,375, according to an Interior Department spokeswoman. Commercial airlines run daily flights between the two airports ? Las Vegas and Kalispell ? for around $300.

Augusto Beato, an Oregon-based reputation management expert said a solution to the controversy would be for Zinke to reimburse the Interior Department for the chartered flights ? taxpayers should only be responsible for the cost of a commercial flight.

The flight from Las Vegas to Montana is not the only time Zinke has chartered a plane on taxpayers? dollars instead of flying commercially.

Interior Department spokeswoman Heather Swift said Zinke?s charter or military plane trips were booked only after officials were unable to find commercial flights that would accommodate Zinke?s schedule. She also said the charter flights were authorized by ethics officials and booked only when feasible commercial flights were unavailable. Previous interior secretaries flew charter flights when needed, Swift added.

In March, two flights were also chartered to take Zinke and staff from St. Croix to St. Thomas in the U.S. Virgin Islands to attend the centennial of the Danish government turning the islands over to the United States. Another two flights were chartered to return to St. Croix later that night. Then in May, Zinke and his wife used a military aircraft to travel to Norway. From there, they flew on a military plane to Alaska for events organized by the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee ? in that case, the Zinkes paid for Lolita Zinke?s share of the chartered flights.

On Friday, Sept. 29, Zinke addressed the travel controversy.

?All this travel was done only after department officials determined no other flights were available,? Zinke said during a speech at the Heritage Foundation. ?Every time I travel, I submit travel plans to the department, who determines line by line that I follow the law. And I follow the law.?

Zinke is not the only member of President Donald Trump?s cabinet who has come under scrutiny for costing taxpayers exorbitant amounts of money for travel.

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin have both been questioned by agency inspectors general, members of Congress and the public for chartering private aircraft. In addition, Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price?s travel on private jets are estimated to have cost taxpayers more than $400,000 ? this week, Price said he would stop flying on charter planes and reimburse some of the costs of his travel aboard private jets.

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